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Study Guide

for

**A Tale of
Two Cities**

by Charles Dickens



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Charles Dickens



In seasons of pestilence, some of us will have a secret attraction to the disease—a terrible passing inclination to die of it. And all of us have wonders hidden in our breasts, only needing circumstances to evoke them.

—from *A Tale of Two Cities*

Like the age he described in the famous opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*, the life of Charles Dickens contained both the best of times and the worst of times, its seasons of light and of darkness.

Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England, in 1812. His family was lower-middle-class; his father was a clerk in a navy office. The Dickens family moved often. When Dickens was five, his family settled in the village of Chatham, where the young boy spent five happy years. When Dickens was ten, the family had to move to a poor area of London because of his father's financial troubles. Two years later, Dickens's father was imprisoned for debt in London's Marshalsea Prison, and the boy was sent to work in a shoe polish factory to earn money. In a building he described later as a "crazy tumble-down old house . . . on the river . . . literally overrun with rats," he pasted labels on bottles of shoe blacking.

These events permanently affected Dickens, and he returned to them often in his fiction. He likened the dark, dank shoe polish factory to a kind of living grave. The contrast between his

happy school days and the misery of his life in the factory gnawed at him, and he later wrote: "No words can express the secret agony of my soul. . . . even now, famous and happy, I . . . wander desolately back to that time of my life." Dickens's childhood experiences made him all the more determined to succeed, and they also created in him a strong sympathy for the poor, which he never lost.

His father's continuing financial troubles prevented Dickens from attending school for very long. In 1827, when he was fifteen, he found work as a law clerk, a job he hated. In his spare time he studied on his own and taught himself to write shorthand.

The serial publication of *Pickwick Papers*, begun in 1836 and completed in 1837, made Dickens an overnight success. Other novels soon followed, and Dickens became the most popular author of his time.

Dickens's early novels, such as *Oliver Twist*, were filled with comic characters, gruesome villains, and chatty, rambling narrators. The novels of his middle and late periods, such as *Hard Times*, are much darker visions of Victorian society and attack specific social problems. Two masterpieces, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, are somewhat autobiographical. His two historical novels are *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Dickens and his wife had ten children but separated in 1858. Dickens threw himself into causes such as improving education, and he frequently acted in plays. He also traveled widely, often on reading tours that brought him wealth and created a special bond between himself and his readers.

The hectic pace of his life and his many responsibilities wore Dickens out. His health failed during a reading tour in 1869, and he was forced to return home. The next year, while working on his final, unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens died. He is buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey and is celebrated as a national treasure.

Introducing the Novel

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . . it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair . . .

—from *A Tale of Two Cities*

With these famous words, Dickens begins *A Tale of Two Cities*. In 1859, the year in which *A Tale of Two Cities* was published, Dickens was probably the most popular author of his time.

Dickens had grown increasingly dismayed at the social and economic inequality of British society—the terrible living conditions of the urban poor, an arrogant and uncaring ruling class, and the ravages of the Industrial Revolution. The novels he wrote just before *A Tale of Two Cities*—*Bleak House* (1852–53), *Hard Times* (1854), and *Little Dorritt* (1855–57)—reflect his darker view of society. While it was the best of times for England’s wealthy, with their town homes and country estates, Dickens believed that times had never been worse for the nation’s poor. Hunger, disease, poverty, and ignorance characterized the daily fabric of their lives. Dickens had little hope that a social upheaval, like the one that shook France just half a century earlier, could be avoided.

Even though Dickens’s mind was troubled during this period of his life, all was not gloomy. He had met and fallen in love with a young actress named Ellen Ternan. She was a petite blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman whom scholars feel is the model for Lucie Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*. New beginnings—like the ones in Dickens’s life—became an important theme in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The title of the first book of *A Tale of Two Cities*, “Recalled to Life,” probably had special meaning for Dickens in the late 1850s.

The novel tells the story of people whose lives are interrupted or wasted, then reawakened with a new purpose. It shows how the mistakes of the past and the evil they cause can be turned into triumphs through suffering and virtuous actions.

Stylistically, *A Tale of Two Cities* was something new for Dickens. Unlike most of his novels, the book is not set in the England of

Dickens’s own time, and it is his only book that takes place mostly in a foreign country. More importantly, the book lacks the huge comic gallery of whimsical and eccentric characters that made Dickens famous. There is no Scrooge, no Fagin, and no Mr. Pickwick. There is very little of the humor that made Dickens’s readers laugh, and few of the touching sentimental episodes that made them weep.

Instead, Dickens chose to make the plot the centerpiece of this novel. He called it “the best story I have written.” Critics have praised the way all the events relate to the progress of destiny. Several of the characters are symbolic representations of ideas rather than real-life individuals. One such character does not even have a name. The novel is rich in its detailed descriptions, its panoramic sweep of history, and its suspense, mystery, and terror. It is not surprising that *A Tale of Two Cities* has been filmed so many times.

Dickens hoped to make the wider historical events of the French Revolution understandable by portraying the personal struggles of one group of people. In the preface to the novel, however, he also gives readers a clue about the meaning the book had in his personal life:

Throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me; I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself.

It is not hard to read into these lines Dickens’s own feeling of being trapped by overwhelming duties and responsibilities. But the lines may also express the liberating emotion Dickens felt at being, like Dr. Manette of the novel, “recalled to life.”

THE TIME AND PLACE

The action of *A Tale of Two Cities* takes place over a period of about eighteen years, beginning in 1775 and ending in 1793. Some of the story takes place earlier, as told in the flashback. A **flashback** reveals something that happened before that point in the story or before the story began. It provides information to help explain key events in the story.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the key events take place just before and during the French Revolution. The novel is set mostly in London and Paris, with some chapters set in rural France

and the English port city of Dover. The novel—Dickens’s twelfth—was published in the author’s new magazine, *All the Year Round*, from April to November 1859, and in book form the same year.

Did You Know?

The French Revolution was one of the most important events of the 1700s, and its influence was still strong in Charles Dickens’s time. The revolution began in 1789 with the attack on the notorious prison, the Bastille—a key event in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Throughout the revolution’s different phases, various elected bodies ruled France, but none enjoyed total support of the people. Several forces resorted to terrorism to defeat their political opponents.

In addition to national turmoils, France was struggling with other countries in Europe. France’s revolutionary government frightened Europe’s monarchs, who feared that the spread of democratic ideas would bring an end to their power. The European monarchs sent troops to end the threat to their thrones.

Wars raged for six years. The French government had many problems to deal with, including opposition from some French citizens. In 1799

certain political leaders plotted to overthrow the current government. They chose the French general Napoleon Bonaparte to help them. Bonaparte quickly took power and crowned himself emperor a few years later.

Though historians may disagree on some points, they generally cite five reasons why the revolution occurred: France could not produce enough food to feed its people; the newly wealthy middle-class was without political power; peasants hated the ancient feudal system, in which they were forced to work for local nobles; new ideas about social and political reforms were spreading; and the French

Before You Read

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the First

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What would it be like to spend a long time away from your friends, family, and home? How would you cope with returning to your old life?

Journal Writing

Write in your journal about the most difficult challenges you'd face. Discuss how you would deal with them, as well as how other people could help you cope with your return to your old life.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how one man responded to the end of a long nightmare of captivity.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

A Tale of Two Cities, like all of Dickens's novels, was published serially, or in weekly or monthly installments in popular magazines. The installments usually included one or two chapters and an illustration of an important or dramatic scene. The novels were then published in book form after the serial was finished. Although some novels had been published serially before Dickens's time, his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–37), set the standard for serial publishing in nineteenth-century Britain. Dickens chose *A Tale of Two Cities* as the first serial to be published in his own new magazine, *All the Year Round*.

The serial form allowed Dickens to introduce a large number of characters and develop the reader's familiarity with them. It also allowed the author to respond to the likes and dislikes of the audience as he was writing the novel. Finally, serial publication required Dickens to end each installment with a "cliffhanger." He hoped this technique would leave the audience in suspense, hungry for more of the story and willing to buy the next issue. For example, Chapter 5 ends with a glimpse at a mysterious, unknown man in a darkened attic room. Anxious readers had to wait a week to find out who he was. This technique proved successful for Dickens in this novel as well as his others. *A Tale of Two Cities* sold thousands of copies of his magazine each week. As you read, pay attention to how Dickens ends each chapter.

Background for *A Tale of Two Cities*

For the historical background of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens relied on a massive history of the French Revolution written by his friend Thomas Carlyle. Many incidents in the novel are based on real-life occurrences described by Carlyle. Dickens was also influenced by Carlyle's belief that the revolution was inspired by the centuries of cruelty and poverty the French poor had to endure at the hands of the corrupt nobility.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

countenance [kəʊn'tə nəns] *n.* face; appearance

doleful [dɔɪ'ləfəl] *adj.* sad; gloomy

flounder [flaʊn'dər] *v.* to struggle to move

prevalent [prɪv'ələnt] *adj.* common

sagacity [sə'gæs'ətē] *n.* wisdom

sublime [səb'lɪm'] *adj.* elevated

tedious [tē'dēəs] *adj.* boring; dull

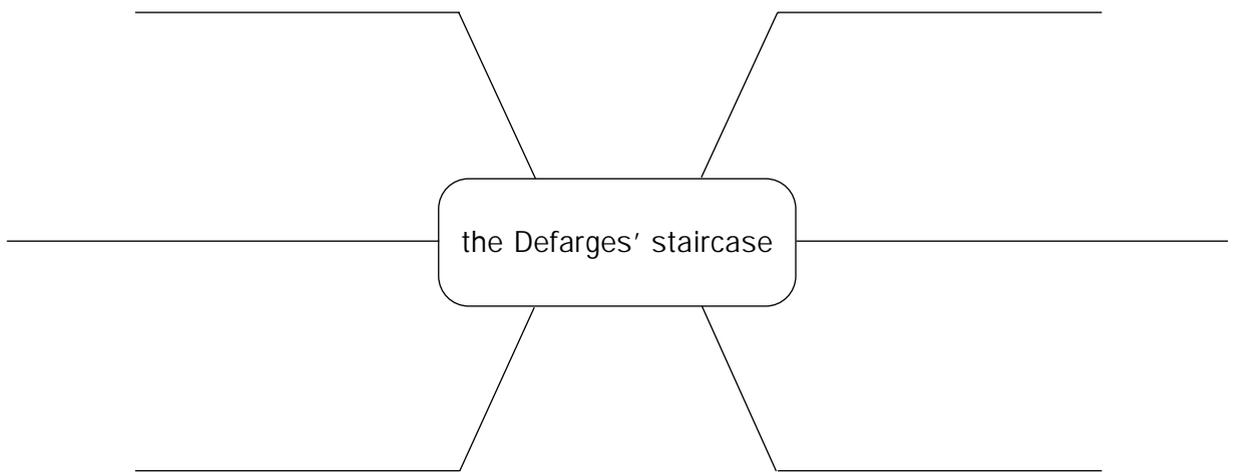
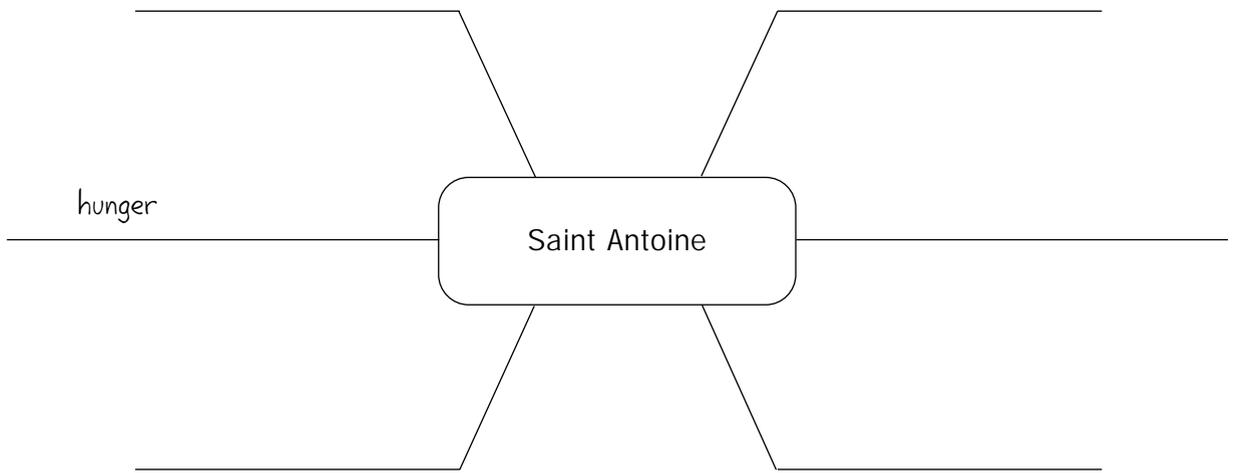
tremulous [trɛm'yələs] *adj.* trembling

Active Reading

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the First

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens uses vivid and often terrifying descriptive details to set a scene, create atmosphere, or portray a character. In Chapter 5, the descriptions of the misery in the Saint Antoine district of Paris around the wine shop and of the Defarges' filthy staircase convey, in typical Dickensian style, the horror of those two places. Use the chart below to make a word web of related descriptive words and phrases that help you visualize the scene.



Responding

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the First

Personal Response

In the **Focus Activity** on page 12, you wrote about how you might feel if you returned home after a long time away from family and friends. Using what you wrote, how do you think Dr. Manette feels? What might you like to say to him?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What is the significance of the title of Book the First, “Recalled to Life”?

2. What is the subject of Jarvis Lorry’s dream? How does this relate to the literal events of the story?

3. With whom has Dr. Manette been staying since his release from prison? In what activity does his hostess constantly engage?

Responding

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the First

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. What is your opinion of the scene in which Dr. Manette meets Lucie in the attic room? Do you find it real and convincing, or sentimental and corny? Explain your answer, citing evidence from the text.

5. Think of the scene in which the residents of Saint Antoine scurry after the spilled wine. What does the behavior of the residents suggest to you about them?

Literature and Writing

Analyzing Key Passages

The opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities* is one of the most famous in all of English literature. It is an example of **parallelism**, the repeated use of words, phrases, or sentences that have similar grammatical form. On a separate sheet of paper, analyze how Dickens uses parallelism to state themes that might be developed in the novel. Point to examples from Book the First that continue the development of themes introduced in the opening paragraph.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In your group, have a volunteer read the novel's opening paragraph. Then discuss whether or not this description could apply to all times instead of just the period about which Dickens is writing. Give examples from current events that might support or oppose the idea that today is also the best of times and the worst of times.

Learning for Life

The scene at the beginning of Chapter 5 in which the wine cask breaks is an important one to remember as you read further in the novel. Imagine you are a newspaper reporter sent to interview participants in the incident. Reread the section. Then write several questions you could ask the participants. Supply answers from the characters' perspectives.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Second, Chapters 1–13

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How does knowing that you've done less than your best affect you?

Sharing Experiences

Think of a time when you feel you did not do your best at school, in a sport, in a relationship, or in another situation. With a partner, describe how you responded to the situation. How did the situation affect other things you did?

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover how one talented individual deals with the realization that he has wasted his gifts.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In his novels, stories, and other works, Dickens placed great importance on the names he gave his characters. Names, for Dickens, were often a type of shorthand, a way of communicating something essential about a character. For example, in *Hard Times*, a cruel schoolteacher is given the name Mr. McChoakumchild. Dickens wanted to make sure his readers knew his own opinion of the schoolmaster. In *Bleak House*, Lady Honoria Dedlock is a beautiful, but emotionally cold, aristocrat who keeps inside her a fatal secret. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Stryver is the ambitious lawyer working his way up the social ladder. Another example is Lucie, whose name comes from the Latin word for "light." Notice how often Dickens refers to her as a bright and shining example to inspire the other characters. As you read, look for the meanings of other symbolic names in *A Tale of Two Cities*. What does the name "Cruncher" suggest to you? What English words does Charles Darnay's real name, Evrémonde, sound like? And what might Dickens be suggesting by naming one of his main characters Charles Darnay and giving him the initials C.D.?

Personification

A figure of speech in which an animal, object, or idea is given human form or characteristics is called **personification**. Dickens was a master of this technique and used it often to help create striking descriptions or moods in his novels. For example, the concept of hunger is described in Chapter 5 as staring down from the chimneys of the poor and rattling its dry bones. In Chapter 9, Dickens uses personification to enrich his description of a noble's castle. As you read, notice how the personification in that passage serves several purposes. It not only helps create an eerie atmosphere, it also serves to comment on the life and moral character of the noble himself. By making the castle itself seem to comment on the action, Dickens does not have to express directly his own feelings about the noble.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

allusion [ə ləʊʒən] *n.* indirect reference

aphorism [əf'ə rɪz'əm] *n.* saying

diabolic [dɪ'ə bɒl'ɪk] *adj.* devilishly evil

florid [flɒr'ɪd] *adj.* reddish; flushed

glib [glɪb] *adj.* smooth but insincere

incorrigible [ɪn kɔr'ə jə bəl] *adj.* uncorrectable

languidly [læŋg'gwɪd lē] *adv.* wearily

morose [mɔ rɔs '] *adj.* gloomy

obsequiousness [ə b sɛ'kwē əs nɪs] *n.* submissiveness

Active Reading

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Second, Chapters 1–13

In these chapters of *A Tale of Two Cities*, events occur that have been caused by prior events and that will profoundly influence events that happen later in the story. Use the chart on this page to keep track of the causes of the events listed.

Event		Cause
Darnay is on trial	because	two spies gave evidence against him.
Darnay is found innocent	because	
Dr. Manette turns pale in the garden	because	
The Marquis's trip to the country is interrupted	because	
The mender of roads stares at the Marquis's carriage	because	
Two places are set for dinner at the Marquis's chateau	because	
Another "stone face" is added to the chateau	because	
Lorry must dissuade Stryver from proposing to Lucie	because	
Darnay does not tell Dr. Manette his real name	because	
Carton admires and loves Lucie	because	

Responding

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Second, Chapters 1–13

Personal Response

What is your first impression of Sydney Carton?

Is he the type of person with whom you would like to be friends? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. To what person does the title of Book the Second, “The Golden Thread,” refer? Why is this title a good one?

2. Why has Charles Darnay given up his inheritance? What is his uncle’s reaction to his decision?

3. What does Sydney Carton say he would do for Lucie at the end of the last chapter of this section? Do you think he is trustworthy?

Responding

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Second, Chapters 1–13

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. One of the titles for this novel that Dickens considered and rejected was *Buried Alive*. In what ways might this have been an appropriate title?

5. Why do you think Sydney Carton resents Charles Darnay? Does this seem like a realistic response to their personal situations? Explain your answer.

Literature and Writing

Looking at Nature

Nature is a powerful element in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens often uses natural phenomena to comment on what is happening among the characters. Two examples of this technique can be found in Book the Second, Chapters 5 and 6. One occurs when Carton emerges from Stryver's office after a long night of work. The other occurs during the summer thunderstorm at the Manettes' house in Soho. Reread these passages. Then write a short persuasive piece supporting or opposing the following statement: "Dickens's use of nature to mirror human emotions is ineffective and contrived." Support your opinion with examples from the text.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

What kind of a person is Sydney Carton? In your group, find and discuss evidence in the text that offers clues to Carton's character. Have a group member write down words and phrases that reveal important elements about Carton. Be sure to write down specific page numbers for your evidence so that you may refer back to the text. Discuss such questions as: What is Carton's opinion about himself? What negative traits does he possess? What positive ones? How does he exhibit these traits? Why does he seem to be such an outsider? Does the reader's opinion of Carton change during this section? If so, what actions cause this change? In your answer, refer to specific pages of the novel.

Music Connection

The chapter titled "The Gorgon's Head" (Book the Second, Chapter 9) contains some of the novel's gloomiest and eeriest descriptions. Look at the chapter again, paying attention to such elements as the interplay of light and darkness, and the adjectives Dickens uses to portray the Marquis and his environment. Then think about suspense films you have seen and how background music is used to enhance the atmosphere in the film. Choose background music for a scene in this chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities*. It can be recorded music or music you play yourself. Share your background music with the class. Explain the effects you tried to create by your choice of music and tell what specific descriptions in the book inspired them.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Second, Chapters 14–24

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Do you know anyone who always seems to be making the same gesture or using the same favorite phrase again and again? You could think of these gestures or phrases as the “trademarks” of a particular person.

List It

Make a list of some friends and family members with whom you associate a “trademark.” Then write a short explanation of how the person’s trademark reveals something about his or her character.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Dickens associates certain activities or phrases with specific characters to help portray them more vividly.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

This section of *A Tale of Two Cities* contains one of the most exciting episodes in all of Dickens’s novels, the storming of the famous prison, the Bastille. The attack marked the beginning of the French Revolution. This massive stone fortress, begun in 1370, was the foremost symbol of aristocratic and royal abuses of power. From the 1600s onward, the Bastille was used as a state prison. Many of its prisoners were sent there by a *lettre de cachet*, special orders from the king himself. These special orders were requested by nobles, who often wanted to eliminate troublemakers in their own families. Because some Bastille prisoners were never tried in a court, they often spent the rest of their lives in the prison’s dank cells. As you read the account of the attack on the Bastille, keep in mind that this prison was the most hated building in France. It became the focus of centuries of pent-up rage among the poor. Notice also how Dickens uses language to portray the attackers as a force of nature.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a literary technique in which the author uses clues to prepare readers for what will happen later in the story. Both the first and second section of *A Tale of Two Cities* contain much foreshadowing of future events. In Book the First, Chapter 5, a wine cask shatters. After describing hands, feet, and mouths stained red from the spilled wine, Dickens says the time will come when the people will be stained red with another substance, blood. Another instance of foreshadowing in earlier chapters is the footsteps Lucie hears outside her home in London. Toward the end of this section, the footsteps draw nearer and nearer to Lucie and her family. As you read, look for other uses of foreshadowing. Note the passages that fulfill clues given earlier, as well as those that might be hints about events to come.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

ardour [är'clər] *n.* great enthusiasm

chary [chār'ē] *adj.* cautious

diffidence [dif'ə dənʃ] *n.* lack of confidence

loadstone [lōd'stōn'] *n.* magnet

magnanimous [mag nan'ə məs] *adj.* noble

orthodoxy [ör'thə dɒk'sē] *n.* accepted belief

tribunal [trī bŭn'əl] *n.* court of law

Active Reading

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Second, Chapters 14–24

Some of the most memorable scenes in *A Tale of Two Cities* portray mobs. In Chapter 14 of this section, an English mob follows the coffin of a dead spy. In Chapters 21 and 22, the French mob storms the Bastille and engages in a spree of revolutionary violence. When you read the chapters in this section, use the chart below to write down words and phrases Dickens uses to describe the English mob in Chapter 14. Then do the same for the French mob that storms the Bastille. How do the two mobs compare? What might Dickens be saying about the French and English?

The English Mob	The French Mob
bawling and hissing	dusky mass of scarecrows

Responding

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Second, Chapters 14–24

Personal Response

How did you feel at the end of the section when Charles decides to leave for France?

What would you have said to Charles if he had asked you for advice on returning to the country of his birth at such a time?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What is Jerry Cruncher's secret nighttime activity? What important theme of the novel does this activity reinforce?

2. What hidden function does Madame Defarge's constant knitting serve? In what way does it affect the life of Charles Darnay?

3. Where does Monsieur Defarge ask a guard to take him during the attack on the Bastille? What does he do there?

Responding

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Second, Chapters 14–24

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Several years pass in Chapter 21 and between Chapters 23 and 24. Why might the author have skipped over these years? How does the passing of time contribute to the larger effect of the novel?

5. Why, do you think, does Darnay decide to return to France? Why is he drawn to the danger even though he knows the risks?

Literature and Writing

An Instrument of Fate

One of the key themes of *A Tale of Two Cities* is the role of fate—the idea that things must happen in a certain way regardless of human attempts to change them. Dickens often uses the character of Madame Defarge to represent fate and to deny the idea that individuals' choices can make a difference in life. Her knitting links her to three Greek goddesses, known as the Fates, who were in charge of the birth, life, and death of all people. One goddess spun the thread of life, another measured it, and the third cut it. Examine the dialogue and descriptions of Madame Defarge in Chapters 15 and 16 of this section. Look for her attitudes about revenge, time, and individual choice, paying special attention to the images she uses. Then write a short summary of how Dickens uses Madame Defarge to represent the idea of fate.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Numerous critics have noted that the villains in Charles Dickens's novels tend to be more interesting, alive, compelling, and memorable to readers than the “good” characters, or heroes. In your group, discuss whether you agree with this opinion. Focus your discussion on characters like Lucie Manette, Charles Darnay, and Madame Defarge. Cite examples from the text to illustrate the points you make, including any “trademarks” you discussed in the **Focus Activity** on page 20. Group members should offer explanations supporting their positions.

Speaking and Listening

Chapters 15, 16, and 19 in this section contain extensive dialogue as well as narrative text. Choose an episode from one of these chapters. Work in a small group to prepare a dramatic reading. Assign speaking parts as well as a part for narration. Practice reading your episode, making the dialogue as realistic and convincing as possible. Present your dramatic reading to the class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Third, Chapters 1–6

FOCUS ACTIVITY

You have probably heard the saying, “you reap what you sow.” To what does this saying refer?

Sharing Ideas

With a partner, discuss what this saying means to you. Have you found it to be true in your own life? Can you support it using evidence from history, current events, or literature?

Setting a Purpose

Read to see how the people of *A Tale of Two Cities* reap what they sow.

Background

Did You Know?

The backdrop to this section of *A Tale of Two Cities* is the most violent phase of the French Revolution. For many people, a powerful image of the revolution is the guillotine, used to behead thousands during the years of violence. Although similar machines had been used before in other European countries, the guillotine was first used in France in April 1792. It was named for a doctor, Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, who advocated its use. Ironically, he considered it the most humane and least painful form of execution. The guillotine was used in France to execute criminals until 1977.

The Revolution Marches On

References to real events, most taken from the study of the French Revolution by Thomas Carlyle, give the novel its feeling of historical accuracy. During the September Massacres, which took place in 1792, a thousand aristocratic prisoners were murdered in their cells by the revolutionary mob. Dickens has the murderers meet just outside Tellson’s Bank in his novel. *The Reign of Terror* is the name given to the period from September 1793 to July 1794. During this time, about 300,000 people were arrested as enemies of the revolutionary government, and the killing reached its zenith. The guillotine claimed 17,000 commoners and nobles, and even claimed Queen Marie-Antoinette; many other people died in prison. One of the novel’s most frightening scenes is when Lucie witnesses the *carmagnole*, a war dance performed to a popular revolutionary song. Dickens also refers to the Law of Suspects, which permitted a committee to accuse citizens of treason against the revolutionary government.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

capricious [kə prɪʃ'həs] *adj.* unpredictable

despondency [dɪ spon'dən sē] *n.* depression; loss of hope

dubiously [dʊ'bi'əs |ē] *adv.* doubtfully

imploringly [ɪm plɔr'ɪŋg |ē] *adv.* in a begging manner

lowering [ləu'ərɪŋg] *adj.* frowning

pestilence [pes'tə ləns] *n.* sickness

resolute [rəz'ə |dɒt'] *adj.* determined

throng [θrɒŋg] *n.* crowd

unprecedented [ʌn pres'ə dɛn'tɪd] *adj.* without previous example

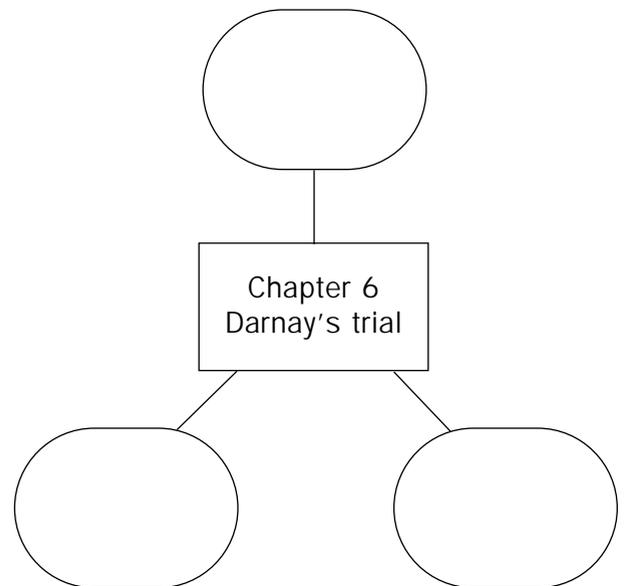
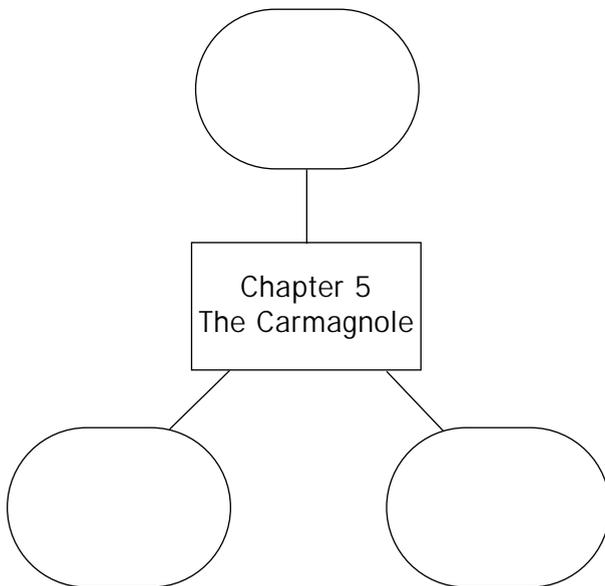
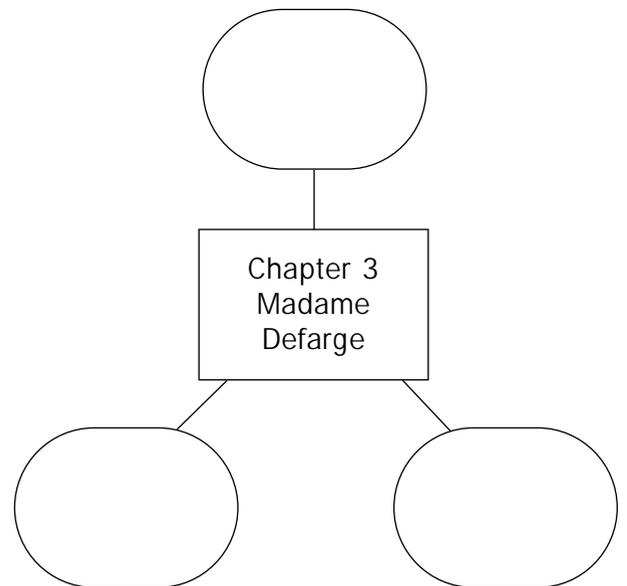
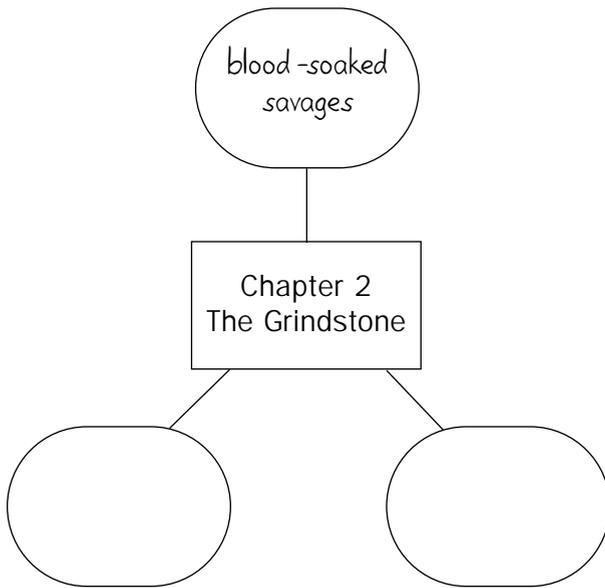
vermin [vɜr'mɪn] *n.* unpleasant small animals like rats and insects

Active Reading

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Third, Chapters 1–6

At the time he was writing *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens was just beginning his successful career as a public reader of his works. Many critics believe that his need for dramatic, exciting, or emotional scenes to turn into readings influenced his writing of *A Tale of Two Cities*. This section includes several such scenes, ones that Dickens may have believed would appeal to his listeners during his numerous reading tours. Use the chart on this page to describe aspects of the listed scenes that would make them especially powerful and appealing to listeners.



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Responding

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Third, Chapters 1–6

Personal Response

Do you believe at the end of this section that Darnay is finally safe from the Revolution? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What is the significance of the title of Book the Third? In what earlier scene did Dickens refer to an approaching storm?

2. What effect does Madame Defarge have on Lucie when the Defarges visit Lucie's apartment? How does Dickens symbolically show this effect?

3. How is Dr. Manette changed by saving Charles Darnay? How does he now look on his long years of imprisonment?

Responding

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Book the Third, Chapters 1–6

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How would you describe the character of The Vengeance? Does she seem like a real person to you? What, do you think, is the reason Dickens does not give her a real name?

5. Do you think that good consequences can ever come from violent beginnings? Think about your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 24. Consider events such as the American Revolution, the Civil War and the end of slavery, and World War II.

Literature and Writing

Ghostly Visions

Ghosts appear in the novel at key moments, such as when Jarvis Lorry dreams about a specter “recalled to life” from the grave in Book the First. The use of ghosts and dreams helps blur the boundaries between the real and the unreal. Analyze the scene in Book the Third, Chapter 1, in which Darnay sees the imprisoned aristocrats. Pay attention to the words used and the atmosphere created. Write a short explanation of how the scene reflects the theme of reality and unreality and connects to other scenes in the novel.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Charles Darnay returns to France, hoping that he can help lead the revolution away from destructive violence and toward constructive rebuilding and reconciliation. Dr. Manette also hopes to use his individual strengths and influence to make a difference. In your group, discuss whether one person can in fact make a difference in society. Support your argument with examples from this section of the text, as well as from real history and current events. Address such questions as what qualities enable a person to make a difference, what forces work against him or her, and what drives individuals to struggle to overcome powerful social institutions.

Art Connection

This section of the novel contains numerous dramatic scenes, including Darnay’s imprisonment with the ghostly aristocrats at La Force, the grindstone at Tellson’s, the Defarges’ visit to Lucie’s apartment, Darnay’s trial, and his triumphant return home. Choose a scene to illustrate, and read it carefully. Then create an illustration using any medium you choose. Below your illustration, write a descriptive line from the novel to identify the scene. Display the illustrations in class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Third, Chapters 7–15

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Love and hate are sometimes described as the two most powerful forces in the world. What do you think?

Freewrite

Freewrite for ten minutes on the topic of love versus hate. Consider the following questions: What kinds of images and phrases represent these two ideas to you? Which people and institutions embody love and hate, and how have they influenced our world?

Setting a Purpose

Read to explore how the confrontations between love and hate reach a climax in the novel.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

A **myth** is a traditional story that is told to explain natural events, human behavior, or mysteries of the universe. Dickens explains the cause of the French Revolution with a kind of myth—a single, general, universal story that stands for all the complex social, economic, political, and moral causes of the real historical event. This myth is contained in the letter introduced at Darnay's trial. As you read this section, notice how the story told in the letter resembles a myth. How does the simplified story stand for thousands of other similar stories? What do the people in the letter's story represent? What actions do they take that have long-lasting importance? What significance does the story have for *all* people? Finally, ask yourself why Dickens might have used a myth to explain the causes of the revolution.

What a Coincidence

Perhaps the first and most critical coincidence in *A Tale of Two Cities* is the physical resemblance between Darnay and Carton, two men who love the same woman. Dickens is often criticized by modern readers for his fondness for—and dependence on—coincidences. Even some of Charles Dickens's friends and contemporaries found his use of coincidences to be artificial and unbelievable. However, Dickens himself justified its use, and pointed to the frequency of coincidences in real life. One way to think about a coincidence is as a symbolic device. Dickens uses coincidences, even far-fetched ones, to show that all elements of society are linked, even if we are not aware of the links. Dickens's coincidences reinforce his belief that all members of society, rich and poor, powerful and weak, are linked together, and have responsibilities towards each other. As you read the final section of *A Tale of Two Cities*, try to look at the coincidences as Dickens's way of showing the concealed connections between people in society. By showing the connections between people, Dickens may have been urging his readers to feel responsible for the destinies of all members of society.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

affect [ə fɛkt'] *v.* to pretend

augment [ɔ̃g mənt'] *v.* to add to

entreaty [ən trē' tē] *n.* appeal; request

epicure [ep'i kyoor'] *n.* person with refined tastes

exact [ig zəkt'] *v.* to demand; to require

furtive [fur'tiv] *adj.* secret; cunning

lethargy [lɛth'ər jē] *n.* drowsiness

Active Reading

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Third, Chapters 7-15

In the last section of *A Tale of Two Cities*, especially in Chapter 8, Dickens reveals secrets and explains mysteries. Some mysteries may have puzzled you from the very beginning of the story, while others have been introduced along the way. The revelation of secrets in the final chapters reinforces the important theme of resurrection, or being “recalled to life.” Long-buried information comes to the surface with important effects on the plot and characters. As you read, fill in this chart to help you keep track of the many buried secrets that are finally brought to light.

Secret or Mystery	Explanation
the “other” accuser of Darnay	Dr. Manette’s long-lost letter
Miss Pross’s long-lost brother	
the coat on Lorry’s chair	
the fate of Cly	
what Jerry found in the graveyard	
what Carton buys at the chemist’s	
Carton’s plan to save Darnay	
what Defarge found during the attack on the Bastille	
why Dr. Manette suffered amnesia after the wedding	
why Madame Defarge seeks revenge on the Evrémondes	

Responding

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Third, Chapters 7–15

Personal Response

How do you feel about Sydney Carton's final sacrifice? Do you find it believable or not believable? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. At what points in the story does Dickens change from the past tense to the present tense, and from third-person to first-person narration? What do these changes accomplish?

2. What explanation does Dr. Manette's letter provide for the actions and vengefulness of Madame Defarge?

3. What does Miss Pross do to protect Lucie and her child? What sacrifice must she make to defend them?

Responding

A Tale of Two Cities

Book the Third, Chapters 7–15

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. What do you think Dickens is saying about death and resurrection in Carton's final vision of the future? Is it believable that Carton would have this vision at such a moment?

5. Why does Carton sacrifice his life? For what other reasons do people sacrifice their lives?

Literature and Writing

Settling an Argument

Readers of *A Tale of Two Cities* have argued for decades over Dickens's attitude towards the French Revolution. His portrayal of the French aristocracy is laced with contempt and disgust, and he strongly ridicules their treatment of the poor. However, he also blames the revolutionaries for reacting to the centuries of injustice by creating blood-soaked injustices of their own. This section of the novel contains the author's final words on his view of the French Revolution. Locate and analyze these passages for evidence of Dickens's attitude toward the Revolution. Then write a short persuasive piece, designed to convince your reader that Dickens was more sympathetic either to the aristocracy or to the revolutionaries.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Some people believe that entire groups or societies bear the responsibility for the actions of individual members of that society. Madame Defarge, in deciding to target *all* the members of the Evrémonde family—even those who took no part in the cruelties of the past—shows she believes in collective guilt. What do you think? In your group, discuss the question of collective guilt. Examine Madame Defarge's reasoning for assigning guilt to Darnay, Lucie, and even little Lucie, supporting your argument with examples from the text. Then, discuss the question as it applies to societies in real life. Examples you might consider are Germans during the Nazi era, Americans during and after slavery and the displacement of Native Americans, and Bosnians during the “ethnic cleansing” campaigns of the 1990s.

History Connection

Dickens's clearest explanation in the novel for why the French Revolution occurred is in the first paragraph of Chapter 15. Read this passage carefully and write an explanation of what you think Dickens means. Then arrange a panel discussion on Dickens's interpretation. Do you agree or disagree? Consider other examples from history and current events to support your position. Discuss whether Dickens's view is optimistic or pessimistic.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Outline of the Revolution

John Elliot

Before You Read

Focus Question

The United States was founded when the colonists, believing their treatment by Great Britain to be unfair, began a revolution. What kinds of issues might cause citizens to revolt against their government today?

Background

Writer John Elliot traveled to Paris in the 1950s to visit the sites where the important events of the French Revolution took place. His work provides a backdrop against which you can place the events of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Responding to the Reading

1. The author notes that the members of the Third Estate poured onto the indoor tennis court at Versailles to proclaim their rights as human beings (their immortal “Rights of Man”). Why does the author call this “the crucial moment”?

2. In your opinion, was the moment referred to in question 1 a crucial moment? Do you think the course of the revolution would have changed drastically if the king had acted to support this “open revolt”? Or if he had tried to suppress it? Explain your answer.

3. **Making Connections** What, in your opinion, was the crucial moment of *A Tale of Two Cities*? Explain your answer.

Creative Writing

On a separate sheet of paper, write an epitaph for King Louis XVI and one for Marie-Antoinette.

from Dickens's Revolutionary Novel

Ruth Glancy

Before You Read

Focus Question

Does knowing something about the setting of a story help you to understand it better? Is it always necessary to know the setting? When might it not be useful to have extensive background information?

Background

Ruth Glancy, a professor at a university in Canada, is an expert on Charles Dickens. In the scholarly selections presented here, she examines the setting of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Responding to the Reading

1. What are some of the parallels Glancy cites between revolutionary France and England?

2. The storming of the Bastille resulted in the release of only seven prisoners. Why is the anniversary of this day still celebrated as one of the most important in French history?

3. **Making Connections** Glancy notes that Dickens “took a romantic approach to history, bringing it to life for the reader in a way that was new to nineteenth-century readers.” Pick a passage from *A Tale of Two Cities*, and describe how Dickens has brought history “to life.”

Character Connection

Suppose you were asked to cast a new movie production of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Choose modern actors for the roles of at least five of the main characters, and briefly explain your choices. Compare your list with those of other students.

The Heirs of Madame Guillotine

David Lawday

Before You Read

Focus Question

What modern occupations can you think of where emotional distance is required to complete necessary tasks?

Background

This magazine article by David Lawday looks at the unusual role of one family during the French Revolution. As operator of the guillotine, Charles-Henri Sanson lived an interesting and complex life, passing his occupation and a place in history onto his children.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to the article, what were the advantages and disadvantages of being the guillotine operator during the French Revolution?

2. What were Charles-Henri Sanson's personal views about his job? What were his views about the revolution? Where did his sympathies lie?

3. **Making Connections** Lawday's article describes in detail the beheading of King Louis XVI. Compare Lawday's description with the scene in *A Tale of Two Cities* where Sydney Carton is executed. Does the use of the guillotine seem more humane than methods used previously? Are the circumstances that Dickens creates around Carton's execution consistent with the description of the king's beheading in Lawday's article?

Performing

Patrick Brunet, a direct descendant of executioner Charles-Henri Sanson, has written a screenplay about his famous ancestors. In a small group, create a dramatic scene in which Sanson discusses, with members of his family, his views on the French Revolution as well as his perspective on his unusual vocation. Assign parts to members of your group. After rehearsing the scene, present it to the class.

The Details of Life

Olivier Bernier

Before You Read

Focus Question

In centuries to come, writers may comment on life in the United States at the end of the twentieth century. What might these writers say about the kinds of food people ate, the state of our economy, and our knowledge of medicine? Given current trends, what changes do you suppose will occur in these areas during the twenty-first century?

Background

In this selection, historian Olivier Bernier focuses on the state of food, money, and medicine in Paris at the end of the eighteenth century.

Responding to the Reading

1. Compare the foods mentioned in the reading with the foods people eat today. What foods are the same? What foods have fallen out of fashion?

2. Bernier notes that after Marie Antoinette and her family successfully survived the smallpox vaccine, “fashion promptly made it a must” for others to get the vaccine. Can you draw a parallel to any person nowadays who has undergone treatment for a life-threatening disease or has made the news for taking a special nutritional supplement?

3. **Making Connections** Cite passages from *A Tale of Two Cities* that describe the kinds of food eaten, the kinds of medicine practiced, or the use of money during that time.

Predicting the Future

In 1774 the vaccine for smallpox was still in an experimental stage. In 1979, a little more than 200 years later, the United Nations declared that smallpox had been effectively eradicated. Predict three medical breakthroughs that you think will occur in the next one hundred years. Complete a class list of predictions.

Letter to Madame Elizabeth of France

Marie-Antoinette

Before You Read

Focus Question

What things, relationships, and values are most important to you today? What do you think will be most important to you later in life?

Background

Writer Olivier Blanc has compiled the last letters of prisoners of the French Revolution.

Responding to the Reading

1. In many of the writings about Marie-Antoinette, she is portrayed as a villain. Consider the often repeated quotation "Let them eat cake." She is reported to have said those words when told that the peasants had no bread to eat. Contrast this with the woman she appears to be in her last letter. What might account for this contrast?

2. Consider the role of royalty in modern European countries. How has that role changed over the last several hundred years?

3. **Making Connections** In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens at first seems to sympathize with the plight of the peasants. Why does the author's sympathy seem to shift to the plight of the aristocrats?

Creative Writing

Suppose you are a friend of Marie-Antoinette. With only hours before her execution, you may write her one last letter. On a separate sheet of paper, write this letter, expressing your profound regret for her circumstances, and offering her whatever comfort you can as she approaches her death.